

*Viet Nam War*

which deeply troubles the Canadian people and which equally concerns the government. There continues to be a high level of hostility and violence on both sides in Viet Nam, and we deplore that as well.

We have not lost sight of North Viet Nam's continued military intervention in the affairs of Cambodia, Laos and South Viet Nam, and in particular the abhorrent disregard for innocent human life displayed in the almost routine attacks against the civilian populations of those countries.

It is, I think, more than a pious hope to say that the issues which have led to a generation of conflict in Viet Nam, and indeed in all of Indo-China, should not be resolved by violence; they should be resolved by negotiations. To all those who believe that, it is distressing to observe the violence which continues while negotiations take place and to contemplate the possibility that the continuation of such violence could endanger the progress of negotiations. Since 1965 when the bombing of North Viet Nam began, Canadian governments have consistently taken the view that resort to force in this form was counter productive in the Viet Nam context.

Canada has a special interest in this matter, and not only because we are close neighbours of the United States. We have been involved in the past 18 years in the thankless task of supervising an earlier settlement and of trying, without success, to make that supervision effective. Beyond that we have been given clear indications of the possibility of our being asked to accept a further role.

It has been indicated to us that Canada would be acceptable to all the parties as one of the members of a new international body which it is expected the present negotiations will create when, and if, they are successful. Canada has not yet been formally invited to participate in this new international presence; indeed, I anticipate that no such invitation will be addressed to any of the potential members until an agreement is concluded. We have, however, been asked to consider the possibility and we have done so most carefully.

Canada would, of course, wish to play a constructive role in assisting a peaceful political settlement if the parties wished it to do so, if that role were within Canada's capabilities and resources and if it held the promise of success. The government has long wished to see military violence end in Viet Nam and to see its friend and neighbour, the United States, disengage itself from that military conflict.

If the parties to that conflict invite Canada to play a role in which we could effectively contribute to a cessation of hostilities there and which would help the United States to end its military involvement in Viet Nam, we would of course consider the invitation sympathetically and constructively. There is no question, however, of Canada, as a part of a new commission, attempting to maintain peace through the use of arms. The implementation of the ceasefire would be the responsibility of the belligerents, and the role being contemplated for a new international commission would be to observe and report on the implementation of those parts of the ceasefire agreement which the commission is asked to supervise.

[Mr. Sharp.]

In considering the invitation to participate in a new commission, however, we would have an obligation to the people of Canada, to this House and to those Canadians who would be asked to go to Viet Nam to implement our role there which, I should emphasize once again, would not be a military role but would involve only observation and reporting, to ensure that Canada's contribution could be a real and effective one and to ensure that Canada's attempt to contribute to peace not be reduced once again to impotence as it has been in the supervisory arrangements in Indo-China that emerged from the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Conferences.

Having our past experience very much in mind, in our discussions with the American authorities and in communications with the other parties to the Paris negotiations, as well as in public statements, the government has developed a number of conditions and criteria on which it would base its judgment on whether Canada should participate in a new international commission for Viet Nam. The first condition, and indeed the ultimate one, is that the provisions for the operation of the new organization, when taken as a whole, should be workable and offer real prospects of being effective.

Moving from the general to the particular, we have also stipulated that all the present belligerent parties, the United States, the Republic of Viet Nam, North Viet Nam and the Viet Cong, should be bound by the agreement the implementation of which the new commission would observe and report upon. In this same category we have required that there would be a "continuing political authority" which would assume responsibility for the settlement as a whole and to which the commission or any of its members would have access through reports or consultations. We would prefer it if such an authority could be provided for in the original agreements, but failing that we consider that it could be established by the international conference which, as we understand it, will be convened 30 days after the ceasefire.

• (1410)

We also have insisted that the proposed new commission should have the freedom of movement and observation within the demilitarized zone and in South Viet Nam necessary to achieve a proper exercise of its functions. Moreover, we have required that Canada should be invited to be a member of the new commission by all of the parties concerned.

In addition to these specific and essential considerations we have, from our broad experience in Viet Nam, put forward a number of other suggestions and requests. The extent to which they were met would also constitute elements in our assessment of the viability of the operation as a whole. As an additional condition we have stated that if all the essential criteria I have already mentioned were satisfied except that which relates to the existence of a "continuing political authority", we would be prepared to consider serving on the commission for a minimum of 60 days during which we would assess the outcome of the international conference with particular reference to the establishment of a "continuing political authority". If no such authority was created or if, once created, it ceased to exist, Canada would have to reserve the right to withdraw at any time, even after the initial two-month period. In